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REMAINS OF ANCIENT TRIBAL ANCESTORS RETURN HOME THANKS TO INTERTRIBAL COOPERATION

San Manuel Band of Mission Indians Help Repatriate Remains to Los Angeles-based Tribe After 54 Years in Museum Storage

Los Angeles Basin, November 24, 2008 - Chairman James Ramos of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians conducted a short ceremony on November 20, to assist the Gabrielino/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians in their efforts to reclaim the remains of ancient ancestors that had been in the hands of the Southwest Museum for more than 50 years. Leaders of the Gabrielino/Tongva Band will conduct their own reburial ceremonies in a private ceremony at a later date.

Repatriation of human remains to the rightful descendants of ancient tribal groups continues to be a challenge for many Native American tribes despite clear guidance provided in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which was enacted by Congress in 1990. Native remains and associated funerary and cultural objects held by museums and private parties throughout the United States is a top concern to Native leaders. It is a commonly-held belief among Indian tribes that the remains of those that are disturbed should be returned to the earth as quickly as possible. Indian tribes fulfill their stewardship obligations by working with the law and responsible parties to ensure that our ancestors are never disturbed again.

This repatriation effort was made possible when officials of the Angeles National Forest determined that San Manuel Band of Serrano Mission Indians showed a cultural affiliation with the Serrano people, who are neighbors to the Tongva people of the Los Angeles basin. They found a relationship of shared group identity that could reasonably be connected to the Native American human remains and associated funerary objects of the Chilao collections. This was followed up with a determination that the Gabrielino/Tongva Band, a non-federally recognized Indian tribe, was culturally affiliated with the Chilao collections.

As a federally-recognized Indian tribe, San Manuel provided assistance as an intermediary for the non-federally recognized Gabrielino/Tongva in the repatriation process. Under NAGPRA, only federally-recognized Native American tribes may claim cultural items. NAGPRA does not require Federal agencies to consult with non-recognized tribes.

“It was essential that we took steps to return these remains to the rightful descendants,” said James Ramos, San Manuel Tribal Chairman. “By working together, the Gabrielino/Tongva people can provide a proper reburial.”

Ramos added that San Manuel and Gabrieleno/Tongva have both expressed the importance of returning their ancestors to the original burial site.

About the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

The San Manuel Band of Serrano Mission Indians is a federally recognized American Indian tribe located near the city of Highland, Calif. The Serrano Indians are the indigenous people of the San Bernardino highlands, passes, valleys and mountains who share a common language and culture. The San Manuel reservation was established in 1891 and recognized as sovereign nation with the right of self-government. Since time immemorial, the San Manuel tribal community has endured change and hardship. Amidst these challenges the tribe continued to maintain its unique form of governance. Like other governments it seeks to provide a better quality of life for its citizens by building infrastructure, maintaining civil services and promoting social, economic and cultural development. Today San Manuel tribal government oversees many governmental units including the departments of fire, public safety, education and environment.

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